

Supply—Labour

this was the foremost domestic problem facing the country. When we took this position at the outset of this session it was argued in reply that we were painting an unnecessarily pessimistic picture and that our general conclusions were not warranted by the facts.

If there could be any doubt, that doubt has been removed by the release of February 17 which points out a number of things which are of the most alarming character. Unemployment in Canada now is basically not less than it was last year. It is comparable with what it was in 1958. We now have a situation which began in the fall of 1957 and which continues today to be of alarming significance.

It is interesting to note that according to this release of February 17, unlike the situation in December last the number of persons with jobs in January was less by 162,000 than it was in December. Moreover, according to the dominion bureau of statistics the total number of persons without jobs and seeking work is estimated to be 504,000 in January as compared with 370,000 on the same date in the month of December, 1959, representing an increase of 134,000 persons in one month. When we consider that these bureau of statistics figures are a sampling figure, not recognized by the bureau in any way as a full record of unemployment in Canada, one can appreciate how serious the situation is.

The figure of 504,000 represents 8.1 per cent of the labour force. When one considers that the number of people unemployed in December, according to the dominion bureau of statistics, represented 5.9 per cent of the labour force, we have further evidence of the seriousness of the situation.

The picture all over the country is the same; so much so that this government can no longer sit in its present position of seeming comfort, ignoring the proposals which have been made and the rising demand which exists all over the country now for some action, action promised by this administration in 1957 and 1958, when it sought the approval of the Canadian people in the two general elections of those years.

The regional unemployment situation is, according to this release, as follows. In the Atlantic region employment declined during January; employment declined in the Quebec region more than usual between the months of December and January. In Ontario the number of persons with jobs likewise declined; there were 23,000 fewer at work on January 14 than in the previous month in the largest province. Likewise employment declined in the prairie region, and employment continued to decline in the Pacific region.

[Mr. Martin (Essex East).]

Therefore all over the country there are indications of a decline in the number of men and women gainfully employed in Canada.

At the conclusion of this release are to be found the registrations at the national employment service offices, and these give the figure of 755,387 as of the 14th day of January. We do know from later figures given to us by the Minister of Labour the other day that as of January 28, 786,294 persons were recorded by the national employment service as being without jobs and applicants under the registration formula of that service. We do know—and perhaps this is the most significant figure of all—from the minister's own statement in answer to a question put by the hon. member for Gloucester that as of January 1, 782,542 persons are in pay; that is to say, they are live claimants, receiving unemployment insurance benefits.

Mr. Hellyer: What is the figure?

Mr. Martin (Essex East): The figure is 782,542. I know these various compilations do have a confusing effect, but it is our duty in this house to explain carefully what these figures mean, even though it might be difficult to give, by their mere enumeration, a full appreciation outside as to what they signify. These are people receiving unemployment insurance under the law administered by my friend the Minister of Labour. No one is entitled to receive unemployment insurance unless he is out of work, unless he is in the work force, unless he is in insurable employment. Therefore the Minister of Labour cannot rely on any lower figure than this as an indication of the level of unemployment in Canada at the present time. If he takes a lower figure, then he is saying that people are receiving unemployment insurance without any legal right so to do.

I say this is the minimum figure; and when you consider, as I pointed out several weeks ago, that in addition there are people who have gone into the working force for the first time, others who have found that their insurable benefits have become exhausted, and others who were not in insurable employment at all, I think it is clear that the more approximate figure is the figure of the national employment service, the larger figure; and that of course, as we know, is the figure on which hon. gentlemen formerly relied when they were sitting in the opposition benches.

But for the purposes of my present argument I am prepared to recognize the lowest figure, not as being authentic, not as being anything more than a sampling of unemployment in our country, but as an indication of how serious unemployment is now in the